

Chairman Loychik, Vice Char Demetriou, Ranking Member Miller, and Committee Members, thank you for allowing me to present opposition testimony to House Bill 69, in its original form and if amended. My name is Wade Huffman, I am a County Veterans Service Officer in Greene County Ohio, and the President of the Ohio State Association of County Veteran Service Officers. I served 23 years in the United States Army, and retired in 2006. I am also a post 9/11 Veteran and served in Afghanistan.

I would like to begin by thanking all of you for your service to our country and for your continued service to your communities and our State.

While I honestly believe HB69 was well intentioned, if implemented, this bill could bring unintended separation among the Veterans Community. The motto of the Vietnam Veterans of America is "Never again will one generation of Veterans abandon another", yet, this is the organization that would suffer most if this legislation passes.

This bill, at its core, places one group of veterans over the others. It restricts one group of Veterans from nominating a Veteran who they may feel is most qualified and suited for the position, and requires that they nominate someone who just happened to serve during a specific timeframe. This is simply the wrong approach.

The Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers believe that this bill is unnecessary. The VA has published statistics that post 9/11 Veterans make up between 13.5% and 14.3% of the Veterans population. Higher figures that are often cited are including multiple tours completed by the same service member, rather than unique veterans. As of March 2023, 18% of VSC members were post 9/11 and 53% of VSC Staff members were post 9/11. It is worth mentioning, that under Federal regulations, the current conflict began on August 2, 1990 through a future date to be set by law or presidential proclamation. Using this date, the percentages increase to 32% and 84% respectively. Our association believes that the current era of Veterans is well represented throughout our State.

We heard during proponent testimony that representation matters, and I agree that it does, however, It should be noted that there are no restrictions on post – 9/11 veterans from joining their local Veterans Service Organizations and seeking nominations through them as evidenced by the current number of post 9/11 veterans serving on Veterans Service Commissions. Over time, this number will naturally increase through attrition and as more post 9/11 veterans retire from full time employment and seek opportunities to continue to serve. It should also be noted, that there is absolutely nothing stopping anyone from attending a meeting of their Veterans Service Commission. These are public meetings. Anyone in attendance may suggest or present ideas to the Commission and have a voice, even if not currently serving as a Commissioner.

Again, this bill is presently unnecessary and should be defeated.

The Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers strongly and respectfully request you oppose House Bill 69.

Respectfully

Wade Huffman

President, OSACVSO